

GREEN (S. A.)

Wheeler's defeat, 1675.

x x x x x x x



Green (S. A.)

WHEELER'S DEFEAT, 1675.

WHERE? AT MEMINISSET MEADOW.

*A Paper read before the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester,
October 21, 1893.*

BY SAMUEL ABBOTT GREEN. ✓

IN the Library of the Massachusetts Historical Society there is a manuscript map of a tract of country lying near the western border of Worcester County, which is of much interest and value. It is entitled: "A New Plan of Several Towns in the County of Worcester," and bears date March 30, 1785. The Plan is 20 inches from top to bottom, and 28 from side to side, and represents a territory of about 18 miles by 26 in area. The lower right-hand corner is largely taken up with historical notes, which crowd out some of the places that would otherwise be named. It includes the towns of Rutland, Oakham, Hardwick, New Braintree, Brookfield (before it was cut up into smaller towns), and Western, now known as Warren, besides parts of Princeton, Hubbardston, Barre, Petersham, Greenwich, Ware, Palmer, Brimfield, Sturbridge, Charlton, Spencer, Paxton, and Holden, though some of these parts are very inconsiderable. The main thoroughfares of the region are laid down on the map, as well as the rivers, mill-sites, forges, ponds, brooks, and meadows, besides various prominent hills. The roads leading from the neighborhood to Worcester and Boston are also marked.



In many instances the names of ponds, meadows, etc., are Indian; and on the southeastern borders of Quaboag Pond in Brookfield is indicated the site of an old Indian settlement.

The map was given to the Historical Society among its very earliest accessions, by the Reverend James Freeman, D.D., on April 9, 1791, and is now found in a folio volume entitled "*Atlas Ameriquain Septentrional*" (Paris, 1778), which was presented by William Tudor, at the same meeting. Probably as a safe and convenient place for use, after its receipt by the Library, it was inserted at the end of the Atlas, where many years ago it was bound up with the volume. For a long time the map was not catalogued separately, which furnishes the reason why, until recently, it has been overlooked.

The Plan was made with great care and skill by General Rufus Putnam, a native of Worcester County, and a distinguished engineer and surveyor, whose patriotic services during the Revolution afterward gave him a high position in public affairs. In the year 1785, the date of the Plan, he was living at Rutland, and previously at New Braintree, both of which towns are represented in the drawing, and presumably with strict accuracy. Its interesting feature lies in the fact that the place where Captain Edward Hutchinson's command was ambushed by the Indians in the summer of 1675 is carefully noted.

In modern times the scene of this fight has been disputed, and been made the subject of long and earnest discussion. At the Annual Meeting of the Antiquarian Society, six years ago to-day, the attention of the members was called to the matter by two of our associates who on that occasion each presented papers dealing with the question. The Reverend Grindall Reynolds, the writer of one of these, following the authority of Mr. Temple, the historian of North Brookfield, leaned to

the opinion that the ambush was laid on the easterly side of Sucker Brook, formerly called Great Brook, about two miles north of Wickaboag Pond in that town; while the Reverend Lucius R. Paige, D. D., the writer of the second, took decided grounds in favor of a spot near Meminimisset Meadow in New Braintree, distant a few miles from the other place. Dr. Paige based his opinions in regard to the matter on Captain Thomas Wheeler's Narrative, published in Boston only a few months after the fight; and his views are entitled to great weight. He was born in the adjacent town of Hardwick, where he inherited all those local traditions which rightfully have so much unconscious influence over our final judgment in many matters; and moreover he is widely known as an accurate writer and a zealous antiquary.

In the present paper I have followed the spelling of Meminimisset, as given on the map, although there are many ways of writing the word. Some of these forms begin with "M," while others begin with "W," which originally, perhaps, were different readings of the same capital letter as found in old manuscript.

At a point on the Plan near the northern boundary of New Braintree, where the Swamp and the Hill are duly marked, the following legend in two lines, in rather large letters, appears: "Brook Swamp Meminimisset," and at right angles, in smaller letters, is the inscription "Hutchensons troupe ambushed between Swamp and Hill." This record bears out completely Dr. Paige's theory in the matter. The site of the skirmish lies very near the crotch of the roads, one leading to Worcester, and the other to Boston, according to the map. General Putnam had been a resident of New Braintree, and had known and talked with men there who themselves had known and talked with those living in the neighborhood at the time of the ambush. It is not likely that he would have made any mistake in regard to the place,

as he was a man both of excellent judgment and historical accuracy. The testimony of this new witness was given just halfway between the occurrence of the affair and the present time, and in all respects seems to confirm the opinion of our venerable associate, as expressed in his paper presented to this Society, on October 21, 1887. While Dr. Paige's views are in accord with those of the Reverend William Hubbard, who at the time of the events wrote a Narrative of the Indian troubles, and with those of Governor Thomas Hutchinson, who during the following century was the author of a History of the Province, he may well leave the question to future antiquaries, in the firm belief that their verdict will sustain his position.

